

sacrifice indeed, done in love and gratitude to the Saviour. They could not be replaced and she might die without a bottle of tears to be buried with her in her tomb.

“She bathed his feet with tears”.

Some years ago we saw a TV program in which a grave was unearthed, and when the stone coffin was opened, the body of a woman was found, dating back about 2,000 years. Buried beside her was a long slim glass bottle, just like the one pictured in this book. The speculation was that perhaps it had contained perfume, but maybe it was a tear bottle.

Margaret Walsh
Christchurch, New Zealand

The latter-day Assyrian

It has been a sound practice in our community for many years in the interpretation of latter-day prophecy to assume that if an ancient nation is no longer to be found on the map then the latter-day occupant of that nation's territory is being referred to by the prophet. On this basis, whilst Egypt is still Egypt and Lebanon still Lebanon, we read Edom, Moab and Ammon as referring to Jordan. The question I would like to put is, have we made a mistake in abandoning this practice when it comes to our interpretation of Micah 5?

We have in this latter-day prophecy a clear reference to the Lord Jesus in the first four verses, followed by the words, “And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land”. The traditional view in the Brotherhood is that the Assyrian of this passage has reference to the Gogian confederacy from the north rather than to the modern occupant of ancient Assyria's territory, which is Iraq and western Iran. The following reasoning suggests that we have indeed made a mistake. One matter I feel sure we shall be fully agreed upon is that all the various facets of prophecy must harmonise.

The evidence is as follows:

1 Isaiah 27:8-10. Here we learn that “the iniquity of Jacob” is to be purged by an east wind. The prophet Hosea describes the Assyrian as the east wind (12:1). In Nahum 3:15-17 the Assyrians are symbolised by “locusts”, whilst Moses in Exodus 10:13 informs us that the east wind brings the locusts. All this is useful information about the Assyrian, and guides us in our interpretation of the prophecy of Joel, where

we read of God's locust armies entering the land of Israel. Returning to Isaiah 27, verse 10 also helps keep us on track in regard to the occasion of Jacob's purging “in the day of the east wind” when it says, “Yet the defenced [NIV, fortified] city shall be desolate”. This cannot be Gog, who enters a land where the people are dwelling safely without walls, bars and gates (Ezek. 38:11), which means undefended according to Nehemiah 3.

2 Isaiah 19:23-25. Here we learn that the latter-day Assyrian is to become “a blessing in the midst of the land”, along with Israel and Egypt; and note the words of verse 25: “Assyria the work of My hands”. How can we possibly harmonise this passage with the declared end of the Gogian host, which is to be cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:20)?

3 Zechariah 14. This chapter has long been considered to describe the Gogian invasion, but this does not harmonise with other scripture. We know from Ezekiel 38:11 that Gog enters a land where the people are dwelling safely. This does not harmonise with Zechariah 14:11, where it is when the conflict is over that Israel is declared to be dwelling safely (“inhabited” is the same original word as “dwelling”). Verses 13 and 14 remove the difficulty by informing us that it was their “neighbour[s]” and “the heathen round about” who had been the cause of all the trouble. The conflict of Zechariah 14, we suggest, equates with Joel 1 and 2, and Ezekiel 35 and 36. The trouble comes not from the north but from the east, the invaders being the nations of Psalm 83, all of this being a conflict which will solve for ever the Jacob/Esau, that is, the Muslim, problem.

All this comes before Gog descends, to be destroyed on the territory of the ancient ten tribes of Israel. Remember that Jesus has already established his foothold in the south before Gog descends, for he comes to “save the tents [not tribe] of Judah first” (Zech. 12:7). The prophet Ezekiel, in a much-neglected passage, records the order of these events: “they shall dwell safely . . . when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them” (28:26).

It is possible to support the above reasoning with much more scripture evidence, but from the little given we are able to see that the Gogian confederacy in no way qualifies to fulfil the part

of the latter-day Assyrian in Micah 5, and that the prophet must be referring to the latter-day occupant of ancient Assyria. I realise that acceptance of the above would mean a major shift in the general thinking of the Brotherhood in regard to what happens next in the Middle East, and hope to be able to read some response from readers.

Ray Hughes
Dudley Firs Street

What of distant planets?

I found the short item of the above title by Brother M. Edwards (Jan. 2006, p. 10) quite interesting and would like to add the following comments.

Messages from the earth have been radiating into space for a little over a hundred years now in the form of radio and, since World War 2, television broadcasts. Mankind has continued its habit of polluting every environment it comes in touch with. We have already been told what will transpire here by the Lord, whom the heavens glorify, and will very soon receive a more direct reply from outer space beyond our planet in the return of our Lord Jesus.

Brother Edwards' statement, "Some brethren have postulated that the angels are able to travel at the speed of light and that they may have come from a distant planetary system", is interesting in that it reflects the limitation imposed by Einstein's Theory of Relativity, that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light. There is apparently a considerable scientific minority who disagree with this hypothesis and believe that there are observations of faster-than-light velocities. Einstein made the speed of light a constant in his equations and varied the rate at which time goes by. It may perhaps be that *time* is a constant and that the speed of light may vary, perhaps caused by travelling through the varied strengths of electromagnetic or gravitational fields. That much, both positive and negative, has been accomplished based on Einstein's Relativity has, in my opinion, little bearing on the supposed absolute truth of his hypotheses, as much was also accomplished using Newton's laws of gravity, which preceded the discovery of electromagnetic forces.

The foregoing could mean that there are absolutely no restrictions on the speed at which angels can travel across the universe, since they have been created to the Father's specifications. The heavens declare the glory of the Lord and there are no limitations to His power. This means

that He can enable His messengers, and His Son Jesus, to travel at whatever speed is necessary to accomplish the task at hand.

I agree with Brother Edwards' statement that almost all of this speculation has little or no relevance to our prime concern, which is our salvation, but thought these observations might have some interest.

Robert Scott Thomson
Edmonton, Canada.

Jesus' "perfect sacrifice"

I would like to comment on Brother Bill Guy's letter in the January issue (p. 25). Although we are exhorted to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48), we all realise that true perfection can only be ours when, by grace, we have put on incorruptibility and immortality (1 Cor. 15:53).

In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ could not have been truly perfect while still in his earthly form, marred as it was by the weight of the sin he bore for us. He did learn obedience by the things he suffered (Heb. 5:8), but was he "made perfect", becoming the author of our salvation (v. 9), before or after he actually laid down his life? Jesus himself told his disciples, "and the third day I shall be *perfected*" (Lk. 13:32), using the same Greek word *teleioō*, meaning 'ended' or 'completed', as is used in Hebrews 5:9. In Luke 13:32 it must refer to his resurrection. In his great prayer of John 17 he declared that he had "finished [Gk. *teleioō*]" the work which his Father had given him to do (v. 4), but it was not until he was about to yield his spirit that he was able to say, "It is finished [Gk. *teleō*]" (19:30). I therefore agree with Brother Bill Guy's suggestion that our Lord was not perfected until he had risen from the grave, looking so different that he is described as being "in another form" (Mk. 16:12), in which even his followers could not recognise him (Jno. 20:14).

Whether or not we can say that Christ's sacrifice was "perfect", it is wonderful to contemplate the fact that, by his one offering, our Saviour has "perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14), and in that day to come will be able to "present [us] holy and unblameable and unproveable . . . perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:22,28).

Liz Robinson
Watford